

Educate Texas
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Re: Request for Information Related to Interim Charge 1

Honorable Chairman Turner and House Higher Education Committee members,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit information related to Interim Charge 1. Educate Texas is a public-private initiative of the Communities Foundation of Texas and our mission is to increase postsecondary readiness, access, and success for all Texas students by building partnerships, leading innovation, and scaling practices and policies.

Dual Credit

Recent studies of dual credit in Texas have highlighted its growth and efficacy in serving as an equalizer of opportunity and achievement for historically underserved students. Dual credit students are more prepared for college and are more likely to graduate from college in four years.^{[\[i\]](#)}

- Texas has significant and growing enrollment among dual credit students. Between 2007 to 2017, dual credit participation increased by 57%.^{[\[ii\]](#)}
- Today, 12% of all students in grades 9-12 take dual credit and 10% of all higher education enrollment is dual credit.

Texas is considered a national model for dual credit. Our robust program and policies support increased college readiness, provide a clear pathway from high school to college, and facilitate a vibrant environment of College and Career Readiness Models (CCRM). However, a disaggregation of data demonstrates that outside of CCRM, participation among students who are first-generation, low-income, rural, and/or students of color is still low and access to these college level courses is not equal in all parts of the state. In 2018, the Texas Dual Credit Task Force, convened by the University of Texas System and the Texas Association of Community Colleges (TACC), developed recommendations that are still critical to meeting dual credit goals of the state. Educate Texas participated in the task force and supports the following recommendations in particular:

- Create equity goals to address dual enrollment access, eligibility, enrollment, and participation gaps among identified student populations and geographic areas;



- Share data from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) and Texas Education Agency (TEA) to help school districts and higher education institutions better identify and measure gaps in opportunity and achievement;
- Develop resources for counselors, students, and families that clearly communicate the costs and benefits of participating in dual credit programming; and
- Require colleges to advise dual credit students on the courses and degree pathways needed to complete their degree or certification in the most timely and affordable manner, including information on which courses will transfer to a university.

Dual credit should remain a key strategy of the state especially among the students who have benefitted least from its offerings. By examining data and setting goals for dual credit with a focus on equity, we can increase access to dual credit and put more students on a clear pathway to college completion.

Transfer and Academic Progress

Educate Texas convenes the [Texas Student Success Council \(TSSC\)](#), a statewide policy and advocacy group of stakeholders representing K-12, higher education, business, and philanthropy and is chaired by Dr. William Serrata, president of El Paso Community College, and vice-chaired by HD Chambers, Superintendent of Alief ISD, and James Hallmark, Vice Chancellor of the Texas A&M System. The Council develops policy recommendations to support streamlined pathways from K-12 to higher education and into the workforce. In addition to focusing on dual credit, TSSC has deeply examined the impact of credit portability and transfer on postsecondary success. As a state:

- 73% of Texas bachelor's graduates transfer hours from community colleges, making Texas the nation's leader in the percentage of graduates who utilize community college offerings in completing their bachelor's.
- At the same time, transfer rates from community colleges to universities are stagnating,
- decreasing by nearly 18% between 2013 and 2017.

The overwhelming majority of community college students — approximately 80% — intend to pursue a bachelor's degree, but only 20% make the leap. Therefore, it is incumbent on all of us to aid students in finding and navigating a path toward a credit or credential of value. Policies that improve both transfer credit portability and applicability are essential to keeping Texas students on track to earning the college credentials necessary to remain competitive in the 21st century marketplace.

The Council has developed recommendations with the input of numerous stakeholders over the last year. The 86th legislative session marked the passage of SB 25, a monumental credit transfer bill. The first data collection from this bill will not be available until 2021



and the THECB committee is still in the process of developing recommendations. Meanwhile, COVID-19 has upended education as institutions across the nation have been forced to move online and to develop contingency plans for in-person learning. Therefore, ensuring that students are able to receive credit for what they have learned is more important than ever. The Council offers the following recommendations to further strengthen policies that ensure student transfer, improve credit portability, and ultimately contribute to the completion of postsecondary credentials:

- 1. For the top 25 programs into which students are transferring, require universities to identify lower-division transfer courses that apply to that program, the courses that also count for core requirements, and any additional lower-division requirements from that program.**

This policy has the potential to empower students and high school counselors with the information they need to more efficiently choose and transfer coursework. There is also a need to examine the programs that do not have established pathways and provide guidance so that these programs can improve transferability for students.

- 2. Improve data sharing between TEA and THECB to support efficient transfer of credits for students. Provide institutions of higher education with disaggregated transfer data (including student outcomes) to map pathways and help students understand their opportunities and choices for degrees and credentials. We specifically recommend:**

- a. Using data on credit transfer and course sequences supplied by IHEs in compliance with SB 25 to build new (or improve existing) tools and resources to identify course-taking patterns and map more efficient transfer pathways.
- b. Conducting a study examining alignment between incentives for transfer in K-12 and higher education to understand their impact on credit transfer, including:
 - i. College, Career, and Military Readiness (CCMR) bonuses in K-12 established by HB 3 and how they support alignment with the 60x30TX postsecondary goals.
 - ii. Fields of study and meta-majors as they support credit transfer between two- and four-year institutions of higher education.
 - iii. The [guided pathways](#) efforts developed by community college systems designed to help more students earn meaningful credentials and transfer to universities with no loss of credit.



- c. Make student data actionable for the approximately 80% of students who do not matriculate to four-year institutions by proactively communicating transfer options to students. THECB should develop and support a communications campaign that outlines transfer options for dual credit and two-year students. Using state-level data about four-year institutions, students would receive a letter listing institutions that are likely to accept them based on their GPAs, degree pathways, certifications, etc.

3. Establish an environment in Texas that is favorable to competency-based education (CBE) and credit for prior learning (CPL). This includes:

- a. Supporting institutions offering competency-based education by exempting accredited CBE programs from formula funding penalties developed for seat-based programs. These include the three-repeat rule, the six-drop rule, and excess credit penalties.
- b. As appropriate and feasible, the THECB should develop new rules specific to competency-based education programs. Additionally, the agency should provide tools and resources to support CBE programs implementing the new rules.
- c. Authorize an interim study exploring the impact of credit for prior learning on student outcomes. Include guidance on best practices for assessing, incorporating, and reporting credit for prior learning counted toward a degree plan.

Supporting high-quality competency-based education and ensuring credit for prior learning allows students to progress toward degrees and credentials online and at the pace that works best for them. The formula funding rules and penalties were designed to decrease time to degree for seat-based programs, but they have had the unintended consequence of forcing CBE programs into a semester-based, seat-time structure. To support the scale of innovative options for students, we recommend refining these policies.

In support of these policy recommendations, Philanthropy Advocates, a collaboration with Educate Texas, is working with the TACC to conduct research that clarifies current transfer policy and positions among practitioners and associations. Additionally, Philanthropy Advocates is supporting TACC in conducting a survey of current students to understand how student behavior towards transfer has been impacted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This research project is meant to facilitate a better understanding of the experiences of community college students with intentions to transfer to a 4-year college, to translate the findings into a state and local policy context, and to share this knowledge



broadly with the intention of influencing the improvement of transfer-related policy and practice.

Thank you for the opportunity to share information on dual credit, transfer, and postsecondary completion policies. As you work to address the challenges and opportunities facing students and institutions, we hope these recommendations can inform your policy development. Please let us know if you have any questions or need any further information.

Sincerely,

John Fitzpatrick
Executive Director
Educate Texas

Please contact Priscilla Aquino-Garza, Director of Policy at Educate Texas, at pgarza@cftexas.org with questions, comments, or requests. Educate Texas serves as a thought partner to legislative offices in efforts to increase postsecondary readiness, access, and success for all Texas students.

^[1] The University of Texas System and the Texas Association of Community Colleges. Dual Credit, Where College Meets High School. (2018). Report of the Dual Credit Task Force. Retrieved from <https://utsystem.edu/offices/academic-affairs/student-success/our-p20-work/p20-projects/strengthening-dual-credit>.

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American Institutes for Research. Dual Credit Education Programs in Texas Phase II. (December, 2018). Retrieved from: <http://reportcenter.theccb.state.tx.us/reports/data/dual-credit-education-programs-in-texas-phase-ii1/>

^[2] Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, Overview of Dual Credit: <http://reportcenter.theccb.state.tx.us/agency-publication/miscellaneous/dual-credit/>